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ABSTRACT

In 1983 "A Nation at Risk" recommended that all students seeking a high-school diploma be required to enroll in the "New Basics," a core curriculum composed of 4 years of English and 3 years each of social studies, science, and mathematics. Although several states have adopted the set of requirements, others have chosen a less restrictive set that requires 4 years of English, 3 years of social studies, and 2 years each of science and mathematics. This brief presents an overview of high school course-taking in the core subject areas for the years 1982, 1987, 1990, and 1994. Analysis of National Center for Education Statistics shows that between 1982 and 1994, the percentage of high school graduates earning the less restrictive number of units in core courses more than doubled, while those earning the "New Basics" units more than tripled. These increases occurred for both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups. Students enrolled in both academic and vocational programs were just as likely as students enrolled solely in an academic program to fulfill the less restrictive requirements. However, students enrolled in an academic program only were more likely to meet the more restrictive "New Basics" requirements than those in both programs. Finally, the percentage fulfilling the "New Basics" requirements increased 39 percentage points between 1982 and 1994 for private school graduates, compared to an increase of 37 percentage points for public school graduates. Although the increase was smaller for private school graduates (32 percentage points) than for public school graduates (44 percentage points), a greater proportion of private school students (80 percent) earned the less restrictive numbers of units in 1994 than public school students (73 percent). Five tables are included. (LMI)

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INDICATOR OF THE MONTH

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High school course taking in the core subject areas

In 1983, A Nation at Risk recommended that all students seeking a diploma be required to enroll in the "New Basics," a core curriculum composed of 4 years of English and 3 years each of social studies, science, and mathematics.[1] While several states have adopted this set of requirements, others have chosen a less restrictive set that requires 4 years of English, 3 years of social studies, and 2 years each of science and mathematics.

- **Between 1982 and 1994, the percentage of high school graduates earning the less restrictive number of units in core courses more than doubled, while those earning the "New Basics" units more than tripled. These increases occurred for both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups.**
- **Students enrolled in both academic and vocational programs were just as likely as students enrolled solely in an academic program to fulfill the less restrictive requirements. However, students enrolled in an academic program only were more likely to meet the more restrictive "New Basics" requirements than those in both programs.**
- **For private school graduates, the percentage fulfilling the "New Basics" requirements increased 39 percentage points between 1982 and 1994, compared to an increase of 37 percentage points for public school graduates. While the increase was smaller for private school graduates (32 percentage points) than for public school graduates (44 percentage points), a greater proportion of private school students (80 percent) earned the less restrictive number of units in 1994 than public school students (73 percent).**

Percentage of high school graduates earning the minimum number of units in core courses, by type of curriculum and selected characteristics: 1982, 1987, 1990, and 1994

	"New Basics" curriculum[1]				Less restrictive curriculum			
Characteristics	1982	1987	1990	1994	1982	1987	1990	1994
Total	**14.0**	**28.3**	**39.6**	**50.6**	**31.4**	**53.6**	**66.2**	**73.8**
Sex								
Male	14.8	29.0	40.0	48.4	31.3	53.0	65.3	71.3
Female	13.3	27.6	39.2	52.6	31.5	54.2	67.1	76.3
Race/ethnicity								
White	15.5	29.3	40.6	53.6	32.4	53.0	65.6	75.0
Black	11.5	24.1	41.5	44.7	31.3	55.3	72.6	74.9
Hispanic	6.7	16.8	30.4	43.8	25.3	47.6	63.6	76.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	21.3	45.6	48.7	56.6	34.6	67.1	70.2	73.5
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6.5	24.6	21.6	43.6	35.3	62.1	49.9	73.0
Student program[2]								
Academic	30.6	47.6	56.3	63.3	56.3	72.8	81.3	83.1
Vocational	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.4	13.5	14.3	20.2
Both	18.6	26.2	35.6	47.3	56.9	71.0	78.2	82.4
Neither	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	12.7	14.5	14.7

Table reads: 14.8 percent of 1982 male high school graduates earned the minimum number of units in core courses under the "New Basics" curriculum, and 31.3 percent earned the minimum under the less restrictive curriculum.

[1] The "New Basics" curriculum also includes 0.5 units of computer science which was not included in this analysis.

[2] To be placed in the "Academic" category, a student must have earned at least 12 credits in the core courses and not have met the "Vocational" category requirements. To be placed in the "Vocational" category, a student must have earned at least three credits in a single occupationally specific vocational education area but not have met the course credit requirements for the academic category. "Both" means the student met the requirements for both the academic and vocational programs. "Neither" means the student did not meet the requirements for either the academic or the vocational programs.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The 1994 High School Transcript Study Tabulations: Comparative Data on Credits Earned and Demographics for 1994, 1990, 1987 and 1982 High School Graduates*, 1996.

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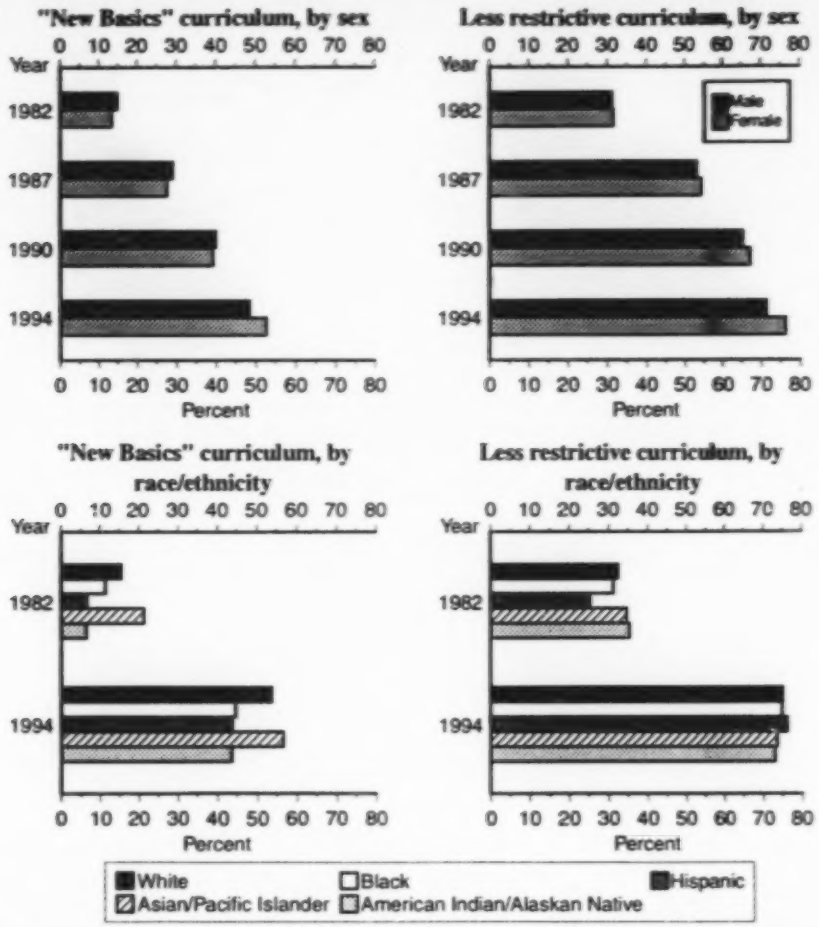
Percentage of high school graduates earning a minimum number of units in core courses, by type of curriculum, sex, and race/ethnicity: 1982, 1987, 1990, and 1994



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The 1994 High School Transcript Study Tabulations: Comparative Data on Credits Earned and Demographics for 1994, 1990, 1987 and 1982 High School Graduates*, 1996.

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